UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

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FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife

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RACE FOR OUTER SPACE BRINGS A BOON TO FLORIDA DUCKS AND GEESE

One wouldn't expect the race for outer space to be helpful to ducks and geese, but that is what has happened at NASA's John F. Kennedy Space Center near Cape Kennedy, Florida.

The National Aeronautics and Space Administration has made available a total of 38,700 acres to the Department of the Interior for a waterfowl refuge.

The Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge was established in August 1963, when 25,300 acres of marshland were made available for management by Interior's Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife. This week the Kennedy Space Center added 13,400 more acres to the refuge.

The marsh area, acquired as a buffer zone between the Merritt Island launch area and the Florida mainland, is just north and west of Cape Kennedy.

Before the refuge was established, Fish and Wildlife Service scientists were concerned that there might be adverse effects to wildfowl from the high intensity sound produced by rocket engines during launches from nearby Cape Kennedy and from future launches from the Merritt Island Space Port.

Observations were conducted at Edwards Flight Research Center, California, and biologists could detect no discomfort or injury to penned birds during tests of large rocket engines.

Merritt Island is the second major waterfowl refuge on Florida's east coast. The marshes and surrounding waters are a major wintering area for waterfowl in the Atlantic Flyway.

Lesser scaup duck concentrations, numbering up to half a million, have been seen on the brackish waters of Indian River, Mosquito Lagoon, and the Banana River.

Numerous small ponds in the area are preferred resting and feeding places for many kinds of ducks, including pintails, widgeons, ringnecks and teal. The refuge also is a haven for large wading birds, such as herons and egrets.

Waterfowl habitat is being developed in the refuge through the construction of mosquito control impoundments by the Brevard County Mosquito-Control District.